



shape shifting

Designers are embracing new forms for dining – think irregular angles and swooping curves – to create super social and sophisticated tables

FEATURE Hugh Metcalf

dining tables have been in our homes for many hundreds of years, but we'd argue that it's a design that's not quite been perfected. If you've ever planned a wedding, and had to choose between rectangular banquet tables or round ones, you'll have an idea as to why.

The standard shapes of dining tables have their limitations when it comes to hosting larger numbers. Large rectangular tables are more intimate, but your guests end up in smaller pockets, while on a large round table, you may be able to see all your dinner party-goers, but they'll feel a little distant, and the centre of the table out of reach.

However, we're now seeing new forms for tables that are upending the traditional dynamics created around dining furniture. Irregular shapes, faceted with angles or swooping curves, are creating a new relationship between the people using these spaces, sparking more free-flowing conversation and allowing you to better engage with everyone around the table.

Designer Kristen Peña, founder of San Francisco-based K Interiors, employed such an idea in the design of the open-plan kitchen in a property in Napa Valley. 'The formal dining room is not so formal and shares an open floor plan with the kitchen,' says Kristen. 'The proximity to the kitchen keeps it a little more casual, but perfect for the type of usage the family likes.' In the

adjoining dining space, a table shaped like none we've seen before takes centre stage. It's irregular in shape, tapers from one end to the other and has angles (though with curved edges to ensure it's still welcoming). The result is a table that seats eight, but creates a set-up where each of the seats better relates to each of the others. 'We wanted to play with shapes in the dining

room,' Kristen explains. 'Its design also makes it a piece that encourages convenient conversations, while the chairs provide both comfort and interest with their back design.'

Many of the tables we're seeing are bespoke creations by the home's interior designer, carefully considered to fit these spaces, but it's something you can find ►



This custom table is paired with chairs from Stahl + Band, a design studio in Venice, California



A French oak table from Pierre Yovanovitch is complemented by a custom banquette, designed by Matt McKay

in furniture designs, too. The use of angled facets is an idea that you'll see through Pierre Yovanovitch's design work, for example, but it's particularly prominent in the designer's dining tables. The Kim table is a soft-edged hexagon, while the Liberty is a more traditional rectangular shape that tapers in so that guests can better engage across the table. The Rochefort is a multi-sided polygon, in the larger shape of a loose triangle, that will add a more interesting dimension to your dinner party than a regular rectangular table could ever do.

It was this more triangular shape that inspired interior designer Matt McKay in the design of a modern Manhattan apartment. The dining table from Pierre Yovanovitch's collection makes up the apartment's only dining space. 'This client asked that the space be cosy for weekend morning coffee and reading but also elegant in candlelight for a formal dinner,' Matt explains.

The shape of the table changes the dynamic entirely. 'It creates a really communal, convivial dining experience,' Matt says, 'where all guests can be engaged but not feel too far away, which can happen with large circles.' The table is complemented by another burgeoning decorating trend – the dining sofa. 'The banquette in the window marries these two ideas and begs diners to linger a little longer,' Matt says.

The dining sofa is an idea that complements these irregular tables well, whether it's a love seat on one side of a table, or a curving sofa that perfectly mirrors a more organically shaped design. 'I love the use of a smaller scale sofa in an informal dining area,' says Kate Ballou of Hendrick Interiors. 'The reality is that so much more happens at the breakfast table than just eating.'

'We sit with our friends and neighbours there or it becomes an extension of our

work space where we set up a laptop for a few hours,' Kate continues. 'Having a more comfortable seating option than your standard chair allows for longer and more comfortable time at the table.'

It's also an opportunity to introduce texture, a different design language to break up a monotonous excess of chairs around a table. 'A dining sofa visually gives a break from seeing so many chairs, and can be an opportunity to use another colour, pattern, or texture to add interest to the space,' Kate says. 'Using a dining sofa can also make an off centre placement of a table feel more intentional. If you have a tricky space in terms of layout, and can't have the table in the middle of the room, a dining sofa at one wall can be the anchor and open up the room for circulation or other functions.'

The cleverest thing this evolution of the dining table does is overcome a common problem: table leg placement. 'This custom table idea allows for a fun shape and interesting leg placement, so many people can be accommodated at once,' says Kristen Peña. The tables are designed with no 'bad' seat where your own legs are jammed against the table's.

In Pierre Yovanovitch's designs, the legs sit gracefully around the edge of the table (while still feeling far sturdier than a table with a central pedestal), but perfectly positioned between the table's facets, while for Kristen's table, the legs are placed irregularly to mirror the tabletop, but never in a space that a dinner guest would occupy.

Whether bespoke, or from a designer's collection, there's a question mark over whether this trend has 'trickle-down' appeal for those on not such an extensive budget. They're more complex, and may require thought on a dining room's layout, while being less practical in small spaces. For the rooms with the topography to take on these irregular designs, they're undoubtedly the evolution of the dining table – as close to the perfect table design you'll find.